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The Traveler

Told by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch

Among the followers of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, was a Jew who worked the land in a small farming village near Mezeritch. The Baal Shem Tov had a special empathy for these simple rural Jews, whom he held in high regard for their wholesomeness, integrity, and unequivocal faith in G-d. So whenever the above-mentioned villager would come to spend a Shabbat with his Rebbe, he would be accorded a most gracious and affectionate welcome.

At the conclusion of one such visit, the Baal Shem Tov requested of him: "Please, on your way home, stop by Mezeritch. I want you to give my regards to one of my closest and most illustrious disciples, the scholarly and pious Rabbi DovBer."

The villager was overjoyed to be of service to his beloved Rebbe. As soon as he arrived in Mezeritch he began to inquire after the great Rabbi DovBer, but no one seemed to know of a "great Rabbi DovBer" among the town's scholars and mystics. Finally, someone suggested that he try a certain "Reb Ber", an impoverished schoolteacher who lived on the edge of town.

The villager was directed to an alley in the poorest section of town. Along both sides of the muddy path stood row upon row of dilapidated hovels, leaning upon one another for support. There he found the schoolteacher's "house", an ancient, rickety hut with broken panes occupying the better half of its tiny windows. Inside, a scene of heart-rending poverty met his eye: A middle-aged man sat on a block of wood, at a 'table' consisting of a rough plank set upon other wooden blocks. Before him sat rows of *cheder* children on "schoolbenches" -- also ingenious contraptions of planks and blocks. But the teacher's majestic face left no doubt in the villager's mind that he had indeed found his man.

Rabbi DovBer greeted his visitor warmly and begged his forgiveness -- perhaps his guest could return later in the day, when he had finished teaching his students?

When the villager returned that evening, the hut's classroom furniture had disappeared: the planks and blocks had now been rearranged as beds for the teacher's children. Rabbi DovBer sat upon the lone remaining block, immersed in a book which he held in his hands.

Rabbi DovBer thanked his guest for bringing word from their Rebbe and invited him to sit, pointing to a table-turned-bed nearby. At this point, the villager could no longer contain himself. Outraged at the crushing poverty about him, he burst out: "Rabbi DovBer, what can I say? How can you live like this? I myself am far from wealthy, but at least in my home you will find, thank G-d, the basic necessities -- some chairs, a table, beds for the children..."

"Indeed?" said Rabbi DovBer. "But why don't I see your furniture? How do you manage without it?"

"What do you mean? Do you think that I *schlepp* my furniture along wherever I go? Listen, when I travel, I make do with what's available. But at home -- a person's home is a different matter altogether!"

"But aren't we all travelers in this world?" said Rabbi DovBer gently. "At home? Oh yes... At home, it is a different matter altogether..."

TOLD BY RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK OF LUBAVITCH

Told by the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn; translation/adaptation by Yanki Tauber.

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